

Hello, and thank you to members of the General Assembly for allowing us to share our voices at today's hearing. My name is Sara Schulwolf; I grew up in West Hartford and am a proud graduate of Hall High School's class of 2013. After a brief foray out of state for undergrad and post-graduate employment, I have returned home (quite literally, I am living with my parents again) and am now a second – and almost third! -- year medical student at UConn. I want to begin by extending my sincerest thanks to the general assembly for their consistent support of UConn in the past. With my testimony, I hope to explain why now more than ever, continued support of UConn and UConn School of Medicine is imperative.

For as long as I have wanted to pursue medicine, it has always been my goal to work with underserved population, and to understand the societal, social, and economic barriers that leave groups of people with deficient access to quality care and poor outcomes. Accordingly, when I was considering where to pursue my medical education, one of the biggest draws of UConn was how well their institutional values matched my own beliefs and goals. Having now nearly reached the end of the pre-clinical, or "MDelta" stage, I truly can attest that the pressing issues of health equity, access, and justice are reflected in the curriculum. Frank discussions of social determinants of health, of structural and institutional racism, of the realities and challenges of our healthcare system are all embedded within our studies, ensuring that all UConn-trained physicians begin to explore these complicated topics as trainees.

In addition to what is already built into the curriculum, UConn also provides exceptional opportunities for further study of social determinants of health and collaborative, team-based training for the care of underserved populations through the Urban Service Track, or UST. As a participant in UST, my two years of medical school have been enriched by inter-professional learning retreats and skills "boot camps" focused on a myriad of critical health issues, such as caring for unhoused populations and the elderly, helping vulnerable patients access community resources (e.g. SNAP, rental assistance), the nuances of LGBTQ healthcare, and addressing caregiver burnout. Through a combination of stimulating team-based learning exercises and hands-on activities, these learning retreats have provided me with invaluable knowledge and experience that even as a second-year student I have already been able to apply to patient care.

In addition to the cadre of resources and clinical skills that we develop through our programming, UST also affords us the unique opportunity for training as part of an inter-professional team. Represented within UST are the disciplines of medicine, dental medicine, pharmacy, nursing, physician assistant studies, and social work. In our day-to-day health professional education, we are too often siloed by specialty and forget that in the "real world," we will likely never care for patients in isolation; thus, learning to work as an inter-professional team becomes an invaluable skill for the delivery of high-quality patient-centered healthcare. Throughout my experience in UST, I have not only gained an appreciation for the roles and responsibilities of my other healthcare "teammates," but have also honed a better understanding of the scope and limitations of my own role. I am confident that this experience will allow me to become a stronger clinician and more effectively serve my patients.

Perhaps most importantly, as part of UST students do not simply *learn* about caring for underserved populations as part of an interprofessional team, we *live* it. Throughout our time as UST-ers, students program, coordinate, and deliver over 70 community-based programs per year to thousands of medically underserved patients in our state. I have had the pleasure of participating in many of these programs, including health fairs at Hartford senior centers, a "Covid Calling" initiative in which students acted as a liaison between primary care providers and high-risk community members who were recently

diagnosed with Covid, volunteering at Hartford Community Health Service's Covid vaccination clinic, and the "Nutrition Detectives" curriculum teaching elementary school students how to make healthier food choices. For me, the service experience that has been the most impactful thus far was participating in the City of Hartford's door-to-door Covid vaccination program. In true UST fashion, this effort involved working with an inter-professional team of doctors, nurses, pharmacists, community health workers, and others to quite literally go door to door in the North and South ends of Hartford, offering Covid vaccines to community members, answering any questions, and addressing their concerns. This was public health advocacy and community engagement in its truest form – boots on the ground to deliver critical healthcare resources to a population traditionally considered "hard to reach." And indeed, there were many community members we encountered who, for one reason or another, had been unable or unwilling to receive the Covid vaccine to that point but jumped at the opportunity when it came to their door. I know that this was an experience that will stay with me for the rest of my career, and I would not have had the opportunity had it not been for UConn and UST. More importantly, without the support of UConn and UST-affiliated students and professionals, this program may not have had nearly the numbers of dedicated volunteers that it did.

In closing, as this pandemic has illustrated more clearly than ever, we desperately need healthcare professionals committed to justice, advocacy, and community service. Throughout my two years as a medical student, UConn, and in particular, UST, have afforded me the tools to begin think critically about these issues, as well as a multitude of opportunities to put them into action and give back to my community. I know that this is just the beginning. When you support UConn School of Medicine, you are supporting a generation of physicians dedicated to changing healthcare for the better – in a way that prioritizes equity and access. We are ready to undertake this challenge; but right now, we need your continued support to help us get there. Thank you for your consideration.